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SUBJECT: PARTY POLITICS IN GHANA

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Teitelbaum for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ghana is a stable democracy after having completed five presidential elections in the past 17 years, two of which involved a transition of power between parties. Although Ghana has the best record of inter-party transfers in Africa, the peaceful transitions mask an underlying animosity within the middle ranks of each party. The very top leaders in the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) "get it" and behave as statesmen, and the vast majority of low level party workers peacefully coexist with their political rivals. But relations between the middle ranks of each party are rancorous because they stand to win or lose the most following a change in government. The peaceful transitions of power mask the often strident partisan politics that followed each party's move from opposition to government. Post is concerned that Ghana's young democracy may be setting a precedent of political vendetta. President Obama's visit provides us with an excellent opportunity to help them. END SUMMARY

12. (U) Since the return to constitutional democracy in 1992, Ghana has successfully completed five multi-party elections, and as a result of elections, each of Ghana's two main parties has won an election and assumed power then lost an election and stepped down peacefully, a rarity in Africa. The NDC candidate John Evans Atta Mills won the most recent election in December 2008 by a little over 40,000 votes out of 9 million cast. The campaign was hard fought and, at times, acrimonious, but after the ballots were tabulated, former President John Kufour and NPP candidate Nana Akufo-Addo urged his NPP supporters to accept defeat. The transfer of power was done without violence, which also occurred when Kufour defeated Mills, the incumbent NDC vice-president, eight years prior.

13. (U) At the other end of the political hierarchy, relations between the majority of grass roots NDC and NPP supporters are civil. An example of their civility during the last election was the behavior of party members that served as poll watchers. They were clearly partisan but remained respectful. Poloff visited over a dozen polling stations in a large city and rural communities and witnessed a collegiality between political opponents and neighbors.

14. (U) It is the levels just below the very top that cause the most inter-party friction. These are often party leaders who stand to win or lose the most following a change in government in terms of jobs, contracts, influence, and perks. Once in office, both parties have accused individual followers of the previous government of corruption, accusations which often have merit. Since leaving office in January 2009, the former: Chief of Staff; Minister and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Minister and two Deputy Ministers of Information; and Deputy High Commissioner to India have all been called to the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) to answer questions about business dealings conducted when they were in office. The Minister for Information was denied boarding for a flight to London en route to the US by BNI agents who met him at the airport. His wife and two small children were present, and his wife was

involved in a scuffle with BNI agents that resulted in her being invited to BNI offices for questioning. Many in the NPP view stopping the Minister at the airport as grandstanding and politically motivated humiliation. They say that the NDC is using BNI to harass and intimidate former government officials. NDC officials, however say that similar actions were taken by the NPP when it came to power following two terms of NDC government. They point to cases in which high profile party members like Nana Rawlings, wife of former president Jerry Rawlings, was accused of corruption or the jail sentence served by Tsatsu Tsikata which they view as particularly egregious.

15. (C) COMMENT: Although the last election was peaceful and Ghana,s interparty transition was remarkable merely for taking place, Post is concerned that Ghana,s young democracy may be setting a precedent of political vendetta, perhaps real, perhaps perceived, perhaps a combination of the two. They can do better, and we should find ways to help them. President Obama,s visit provides us with an excellent opportunity to lead by example.
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